DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 110 EA 026 769

AUTHOR Webber, Charles F.
TITLE School Board Members' Perceptions of the Future: Patterns and Implications.
PUB DATE May 95
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Board of Education Role; *Boards of Education; Delphi Technique; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Opinions; *Prediction; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that attempted to predict the future concerns of a sample of Canadian school board members. The three-round Delphi study was conducted by mail with a random sample of 350 school board members in a western Canadian province. The response rate was 39 percent. Participants predicted that their future top priorities would include finance, student behavior, quality assurance, and employment preparation for students. They assigned low priorities to issues of gender and teacher-work overload. Nine themes that emerged from the board members' predicted concerns centered around educational governance, accountability, program-delivery models, societal change, school security, the educational welfare of students, educational finance, teacher development, and curricular content. These themes infer a generalized belief structure to which board members appear to subscribe. It is suggested that: (1) education will become increasingly politicized; (2) teachers will see little professional/economic advancement and an increased workload; (3) social issues will receive low priority from boards of education; and (4) low-cost innovative teaching models and strong disciplinary measures will receive school-board support. Two tables are included. The appendix contains a copy of the concerns inventory. (LMI)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 383 110

# School Board Members' Perceptions of the Future: Patterns and Implications[1] [2]

Charles F. Webber
The University of Calgary

Position: Associate Professor

Address: Faculty of Education
The University of Calgary
2500 University Drive, N.W.
Calgary, Alberta
Canada
T2N 1N4

E-Mail: cwebber@acs.ucalgary.ca

Telephone: (403) 220-5694

Fax: (403) 282-0083

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C. Webber
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

EA 026 769

[1]This study was funded by a grant from the Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies.

[2]Suggestions for revisions made by Dr. Garth Benson and Dr. W.J. Hunter were helpful in the preparation of this manuscript.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to predict the future educational concerns of school board members. The study was conducted to help educational stakeholders keep abreast of educational trends, anticipate problems, and understand the belief structure of school board members. Participants in the study predicted that their future top priorities would be in the areas of finance, student behavior, quality assurance, and employment preparation for students. Gender issues and teacher work overload were among the predicted issues receiving low priority ratings. Nine themes that emerged from the predicted concerns of school board members are also discussed. The priorities and themes are used to make predictions about the future role of school board members and to infer a generalized belief structure that may be the basis for future school board decisions.

## Introduction

Humans like predictability. For example, researchers are advised to select their subjects so that conclusions can be generalized to the larger population from which the subjects were drawn (Borg & Gall, 1979). School administrators are warned that teachers fear and resist change when it might result in uncertainty (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1991). In addition, business leaders are told to scan their environments to determine "where the culture is going to be, where the organization must be if it is to grow" (Bennis, 1989, p. 199). Predictability even helps us learn a language as we develop a set of patterns and principles to guide our speech (Goodenough, 1981).

However, actually achieving total predictability within a specific culture is made difficult, if not impossible, by the proclivity of its members to act in ways that are unique. For example, some people purposely behave in ways that transgress cultural norms (Goodenough, 1981). As well, the environment within which behaviors occur is "subject to the multiple interpretations that are reflective of the multiple perceptions of the reality of the people involved" (Bosetti, 1992, p.6). Moreover, recent changes in family structure, school programs, technology, and gender roles make it clear that guidelines for predicting human behavior are anything but static.

It was within this context of tension between the human desire for predictability and its inherent lack of attainability that the present study of school board members was conducted. The study was a response to Burger's (1991) call for research into

"the adaptability of schools and school systems to environmental pressures" (p. 224). It was also a response to O'Reilly's (1991) request for research into "changing views of the nature of learning, of education, of school, of organization, and of management" (p. 5). Finally, the study was congruent with Herman and Herman's (1991) suggestion that educational leaders "consistently scan their external environment for trends, [so] they will be able to project these trends and develop intervention strategies that will assist in developing and maintaining a healthy and productive organization" (p. xi). Following these suggestions can help educational stakeholders keep abreast of educational trends, anticipate problems, and understand the belief structures of others. This study attempted to achieve this by describing the educational priorities and concerns that school board members predicted for the future. This information was then used to infer a generalized belief structure that may be the basis from which school board members make future decisions.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study, which was part of a larger research project involving principals, teachers, superintendents, and school board members (Webber, 1992, 1993, 1994), was to predict the future educational concerns of school board members. The study was based on the assumption that school board members would be better able to work cooperatively with other educational stakeholders, and vice versa, if they knew (a) the educational concerns, in order of priority, that school board members believe they will be addressing in the future, (b) the themes among those

priorities, and (c) the perceptions that school board members have of their future responsibilities. This is an extension of Nielsen and Robinson's (1980) contention that members of the public need information about school board members and the educational issues they must address.

Another assumption made was that even though it is not possible to predict with certainty the future behavior of school board members it is possible to narrow the range of probabilities. Achieving this would allow educational stakeholders to predict the reactions of school board members to educational issues that might arise in the future. These are important goals in light of Livingstone's (1970) assertion that failure to project ahead means "we are unlikely to generate many cogent or compelling alternative images of the educational future" (p.18).

School board members were selected because, as key decision makers in education (Collinge & Coleman, 1992), their perceptions help shape the environments of school districts. Moreover, the role of school board member is difficult to fulfill and often characterized by conflict with other members of school communities (Coleman, 1974). Therefore, school board members are one group of subjects in a long term research project designed to reduce "conflict among educational stakeholders and begin to ameliorate the perceived discrepancy between society's educational demands and its support for schools" (Webber, 1992, p. 17).

## Nature of the Study

This study was based on a Delphi design, modified from that described by Orlich (1989). It addressed the question "What are

the educational issues that school board members will address in the future?" The study followed the advice of Orlich (1989) and Rossett (1982) that the identification of educational needs and priorities should focus on the professional concerns of stakeholders. The three-round study was conducted by mail with a subject pool of 350 school board members randomly selected from the total membership of a major association for school boards in a western Canadian province.

A modified Delphi design was selected for the study after the advantages and disadvantages of the Delphi technique, as described by the Curriculum Branch of the Victoria Department of Education (1985) and Orlich (1989), were considered. The advantages include opportunities for large numbers of people to participate, maintenance of a focus on ideas rather than individuals, anonymity for participants which makes the contribution of ideas a safe activity, opportunities for participants to reconsider their opinions, and the identification of priorities. Among the disadvantages of the Delphi technique are the large amounts of time required to conduct several rounds, the complexity of data analyses, the difficulty of maintaining participant enthusiasm throughout the process, and the problem of keeping statements value free and clearly defined. Another disadvantage is the possibility of researcher subjectivity affecting how issues are selected and analysed. Finally, a slight shifting of priorities can occur when alternate methods of ranking are used. For example, the use of a total weighted mean, a median ranking, or a frequency ranking each will shift items upward or downward in priority because of the use of different statistical assumptions.

In Round One of the study, 102 of the 350 school board members responded anonymously to this sentence stem: "When I think about the major educational issues school board members will probably deal with in the future, I am mainly concerned about ..." Demographic data were not collected in Round One.

In Round Two, the responses to the sentence stem were used to construct a 61-item questionnaire, the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory" (See Appendix). Then, 136 of the 350 school board members indicated, on a five point scale ranging from "no importance" to "extremely important," how important each of the 61 issues was to them. These respondents also provided relevant demographic data.

The response rate of 39% was satisfactory for research purposes given Borg and Gall's (1979) cautions about using a long questionnaire with subjects characterized by diverse demographic features. It was also higher than what was reached (25%) in a study using a similar Delphi design with a large and diverse group of subjects (Phi Delta Kappa, 1984). In both Rounds One and Two, all participants were sent reminder letters and additional questionnaires in an attempt to maximize the response rate.

An internal consistency reliability estimate, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), was calculated for the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory." Based on 114 cases, the derived reliability estimate for the scale equaled 0.95 (61 items).

In Round Three, all of the 350 school board members in the subject pool were mailed a summary of the results of the Round Two questionnaire. The researcher had promised, in Rounds One and

Two, to give a summary of the findings to all members of the subject pool as a strategy for encouraging subjects to take part in the study.

## Respondents

Slightly less than half (44%) of the 136 locally-elected school board members who completed the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory" were women. The largest proportion (41%) of the school board members had served on school boards for three or fewer years. Another 32% had served for up to six years, while another 12% had as many as nine years of experience as school board members. The rest (15%) of the respondents were long-time school board members with 11 to 25 years of experience in their positions. Most respondents (88%) represented small- to medium-sized school jurisdictions, with up to 6 500 students. Large (from 10 000 to 30 000 students) and very large (from 80 000 to 100 000 students) school jurisdictions were represented respectively by 8% and 4% of the school board members. . Most of the school board members (69%) had a post-secondary education. Thirteen percent of them had graduated from senior high school and 18% of the respondents had not completed grade 12. The school board members were from 30 to 72 years of age, with an average of 48 years.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory" are presented in three categories that reflect the focuses of the study: (a) the educational concerns, in order of

priority, that school board members believe they will be addressing in the future, (b) the themes among those priorities, and (c) the perceptions that school board members have of their future responsibilities.

## Predicted Priorities

The means of the items included in the questionnaire are summarized in Table 1. They depict how important school board members thought each issue would be to them in the future. The issues are presented in order from the highest to the lowest mean value.

The first eleven issues portray four priority areas for the future: money, student behavior, quality assurance, and employment preparation for students. Embedded in these four areas are the three values of "quality, efficiency and equity" that Coleman and LaRocque (1990, p. 27) said have prevailed in Canadian school district policy discussions. As well, the four priority areas are consistent with what school board members have said are current priorities for them (Webber, 1993). However, school board members predict that nearly all of these priorities will take on even greater importance in the future. School board members' high concern with student behavior, school discipline, and school violence contrasts sharply with what principals in the same province report. Webber (1992) found that principals rated school violence, vandalism, and drug abuse among their lowest current concerns and, further, they predicted that these issues would be among the least of their concerns in the future. The same principals concurred with school board members that decreasing

financial support for schools will continue to be a major obstacle in education.

The item "gender issues" was assigned the third lowest rank of all the educational concerns predicted by school board members. This is significant in light of the attention that gender issues have received recently (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Shakeshaft, 1986; Young, 1990). The low ranking is noteworthy when considered alongside the problems associated with how men and women are represented in teaching and administrative positions, the different ease of access for girls and boys to specific programs of study, the often stereotypical portrayal of the sexes in textbooks, and the support the hidden curriculum gives to sexism. The low ranking of "gender issues" corroborates Sheehan's (1991) statement that "The rhetoric of the first three decades of this century that women in Canada ... had achieved full equality and could become leaders in the society was not true in the field of education then - nor is it true today" (p. 278).

The extremely low ranking of "teacher work overload" should considered in light of the views of teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993) and principals (Webber, 1992), who said that teacher work overload is one of the foremost problems in education. These polarized views of teaching are replete with possibilities for conflict and misunderstanding. In fact, the wide disparity of perceptions implies that school board members and educators may not share the same knowledge about what the job of teaching entails nor even the same set of educational assumptions. This may mean that school board member-teacher misunderstandings, such as LaRocque's (1986) finding that school

board members failed to comprehend why teachers did not follow explicit school board directives, are parallel to the conflicts that occur in cross-cultural educational settings. An example is provided by Wolcott's (1967) description of the teacher who plunged "headfirst into conflict when he attempt[ed] to force his own beliefs in a community where values differ[ed] from his" (p. 130). Similarly, school board decision making that fails to address the concern of teacher work overload will likely encounter resistance from teachers.

---

Insert Table 1 here.

---

Themes

The 61 items included in the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory" were sorted into groups of related issues. It should be pointed out that the groups of issues are broadly defined and that another analyst might categorize the issues differently. The nine categories that resulted from the sorting process are presented in Table 2.

The category with the largest number of predicted issues was that of "educational governance." All of the major educational stakeholders, except students, are mentioned in this category and questions are implied about the kind of influence that each stakeholder should have in the establishment of policy and practice. The large number of issues in this category reflects the "political action" orientation of school board members, which

Table 1
Mean Ratings of Importance for Predicted Concerns

| Issue | Rank | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Decreasing government grants | 1 | 4.66 | 0.76 |
| Local tax burden | 2 | 4.59 | 0.73 |
| Student behavior | 3 | 4.41 | 0.68 |
| School discipline | 4 | 4.39 | 0.73 |
| School violence | 5 | 4.32 | 0.72 |
| School board accountability | 6.5 | 4.29 | 0.84 |
| Teacher evaluation | 6.5 | 4.29 | 0.81 |
| Educ. of non-university bound students | 8 | 4.27 | 0.75 |
| Financial equity among school districts | 9 | 4.24 | 0.97 |
| Parental support for schools | 10.5 | 4.23 | 0.86 |
| Job opportunities for graduates | 10.5 | 4.23 | 0.92 |
| Changes in technology | 12 | 4.16 | 0.85 |
| Contract negotiations with teachers | 13 | 4.15 | 1.00 |
| Teachers' salaries | 14 | 4.11 | 1.00 |
| Role of the school board | 15.5 | 4.09 | 0.92 |
| Protection of school property | 15.5 | 4.09 | 0.84 |
| Public confidence in schools | 17 | 4.08 | 0.88 |
| Student evaluation | 18 | 4.06 | 0.84 |
| Drug and alcohol issues | 19 | 4.04 | 0.89 |
| Schools taking on too much | 20.5 | 4.03 | 0.91 |
| Student self-esteem | 20.5 | 4.03 | 1.01 |
| Changes in family structure | 22 | 4.00 | 0.83 |
| Changes in curricula | 23 | 3.99 | 0.91 |
| Moral education | 24 | 3.98 | 0.98 |
| Legal issues | 25 | 3.87 | 0.93 |
| Illiteracy | 26 | 3.84 | 0.99 |
| Safety & protection of students & staff | 27.5 | 3.80 | 0.94 |
| Teacher educ. programs at universities | 27.5 | 3.80 | 0.94 |
| Students working while in jr. & sr. high | 29 | 3.78 | 0.92 |
| Environmental education | 30 | 3.77 | 1.02 |
| Program variety in small schools | 31 | 3.76 | 0.98 |
| Distance education | 32 | 3.75 | 1.01 |
| Rapid societal change | 34 | 3.74 | 0.97 |
| Leadership by provincial government | 34 | 3.74 | 1.11 |
| Student dropouts | 34 | 3.74 | 1.01 |
| University entrance quotas | 36 | 3.72 | 0.98 |
| Redefining the role of the school | 37 | 3.71 | 1.03 |
| Role of the Department of Education | 38.5 | 3.67 | 1.07 |
| Effects of media on students | 38.5 | 3.67 | 0.93 |
| Formation of new school districts | 40 | 3.65 | 1.23 |
| Poverty | 41 | 3.60 | 1.00 |
| Teacher staff development | 42 | 3.54 | 0.91 |
| Integration of special needs students | 43 | 3.53 | 1.07 |
| Decreasing student enrolment | 44 | 3.51 | 1.15 |
| Teacher role in school management | 45 | 3.47 | 1.04 |
| Public and Catholic board conflict | 46 | 3.40 | 1.22 |

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)
Mean Ratings of Importance for Predicted Concerns

| Issue | Rank | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pressure from provincial politicians | 47 | 3.39 | 1.04 |
| User pay education | 48 | 3.38 | 1.16 |
| Private schools | 49 | 3.37 | 1.17 |
| Number of trustees on board | 50 | 3.35 | 1.18 |
| Membership in Sch. Boards' Organization | 51 | 3.34 | 1.23 |
| International comparisons of st. achiev. | 52 | 3.32 | 1.09 |
| Home schooling | 53 | 3.31 | 1.23 |
| Voucher systems | 54 | 3.28 | 1.24 |
| Role of Prov. Teachers' Organization | 55 | 3.31 | 1.26 |
| Year round schooling | 56 | 3.21 | 1.97 |
| Keeping educators in profession | 57 | 3.19 | 1.16 |
| Maintaining Catholic school districts | 58 | 3.18 | 1.45 |
| Gender issues | 59 | 3.10 | 1.09 |
| Teacher work overload | 60 | 3.07 | 1.07 |
| Education of seniors | 61 | 2.73 | 1.14 |

was described by Downey (1988) as characterized by "confrontation, special interest pleading, coalition, and compromise" (p. 12). Further, the emergence of the "educational governance" theme and the issues it contains is consistent with Townsend's (1990) finding that school board members operate from the orientations of "independence," "loyalty to the grassroots," and "a politico sentiment" (p. 157). The "educational governance" theme also is consistent with Townsend's (1990) description of "inter-organizational conflict" (p. 166) among levels of government and Lawton's (1987) statement that Canadians generally subscribe to the belief that "the local community - not the province or nation - is the central unit in society outside of the family and that control of education ought to remain at that level" (p. 10).

The second large category of predicted concerns was "accountability to the public." It is not surprising that school board members feel accountable to the general public, given that a traditional role of school board members has been to act as a liaison between the community and the school. Also, accountability to the public may be partially due to school board members depending upon their constituents for re-election (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Downey, 1988). Accountability to the general public even has been highlighted in orientation manuals for new school board members (Alberta School Trustees' Association, 1983). Further, school board members are under constant pressure to satisfy the public, knowing that failure to do so may increase the numbers of parents and students choosing to either support private schools and home schooling or lobby for some form of voucher system.

"Program delivery models" was a third category of predicted concerns. School board members believe that alternative delivery systems for educational programs will be examined closely in the future. Some, like the "integration of special needs children," are well under way, while others, such as "year round schooling" and "user pay education," are still in embryonic stages. Further, unless current economic conditions in North American shift significantly, financial concerns may prevail over pedagogical considerations when decisions are made about the viability of particular models of program delivery.

School board members predicted that their future concerns will continue to be affected by complex and controversial societal changes. For example, the category of "societal change" contains issues, like illiteracy and poverty, which are difficult to resolve. When these are considered in juxtaposition with evolving family structures, the broad implications of developments in technology, and the overall pace of societal change, it is clear that conflict among educational stakeholders has the potential to increase. This increased conflict may result from the dissonance that is created within any group when there is (1) a difference in "needs, values, and goals" (Johnson & Johnson, 1991, p. 303), (2) scarcity of resources, or (3) rivalry. Because of the foregoing, it is likely that the ongoing process of defining the parameters of the educational mandate will take on increasing importance.

Concern about the future safety of students, staff, and property emerged in the fifth category of "school security." Without denigrating the gravity of the violence that has occurred on rare occasions in Canadian schools, educational stakeholders

should consider how much, or if, the influence of the media and "myth" (Males, 1992, p.54) has caused the levels of violence and misbehavior to be overestimated.

The "educational welfare of students" is the sixth theme to emerge from the predictions of school board members. One issue included in this theme is that of diminishing opportunities for entrance to university which, in turn, increases the importance of the transition from school to work. This transition is discussed by Donaldson (1992), who also described some of the problems associated with students leaving school early and its affect on subsequent career attainment. Both school board members and teachers may need to employ some of the intervention strategies that Donaldson described. They included "referral to appropriate social service agencies, parent-school conferencing, mentoring, entrance and exit interviews, peer support groups and tutoring" along with "cooperative education, work experience, career days, and school-business partnerships" (Donaldson, 1992, p. 46).

The emergence of "educational finance" as a theme is unsurprising given the concern of school boards with cost effectiveness that Coleman and LaRocque (1990) described and previous findings that increased funding of schools is not widely popular among members of the public (Canadian Gallup Poll, 1984). Interestingly, the strong emphasis on educational finance is consistent with the top-most concern of school board members in office two decades ago (Coleman, 1974). As demonstrated by the predicted concerns included in the theme, "educational finance" will continue to be a highly politicized decision making area for school board members.

School board member concern with "teacher development" in the future may be limited, given the small number of items included in this theme and their relatively low rankings. This challenges McLaughlin's (1991) statement that "Staff development has moved from a position of disregard in policy circles to become a taken-for-granted component of almost all education reform initiatives" (p. 61). If school board members demonstrate little interest in future teacher development programs, then the ability of school districts to successfully manage predicted changes in program delivery models will be in doubt.

The smallest category was "curriculum content." The extremely small number of issues in this theme and their failure to emerge as high priorities contrast with Awender's (1988) and Coleman's (1974) findings that curricular issues are high priorities for school board members. This may result from the weak influence on curricula that school boards have relative to that of provincial ministries of education. This may cause school board members to feel that they are not empowered to make decisions that will significantly affect curricula and, therefore, decide that modification of curricula is outside of their domain.

---

Insert Table 2 here.

---

Responsibilities

The predictions that school board members provided via the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory," plus the themes

Table 2
Themes Among School Board Member Predicted Concerns

| Theme: | Concerns |
|---|---|
| Educational governance: | |
| | Leadership by provincial government |
| | Role of Provincial Teachers' Organization |
| | Teacher role in school management |
| | Role of Department of Education |
| | Role of the school board |
| | Legal issues |
| | Number of trustees on the school board |
| | Membership in School Boards' Organization |
| | Public and Catholic board conflict |
| | Formation of new school districts |
| | Maintaining Catholic school districts |
| Accountability to the Public: | |
| | School board accountability |
| | Student evaluation |
| | Parental support for schools |
| | Public confidence in schools |
| | Voucher systems |
| | Private schools |
| | International comparisons of st. achiev. |
| | Pressure from provincial politicians |
| | Teacher evaluation |
| Program Delivery Models: | |
| | Integration of special needs students |
| | Distance education |
| | Program variety in small schools |
| | Decreasing student enrolment |
| | Year round schooling |
| | User pay education |
| | Schools taking on too much |
| | Education of seniors |
| | Redefining the role of the school |
| Societal Change: | |
| | Illiteracy |
| | Poverty |
| | Changes in family structure |
| | Changes in technology |
| | Rapid societal change |
| | Gender issues |
| | Effects of media on students |
| | Student self-esteem |

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)
Themes Among School Board Member Predicted Concerns

| Theme: | Concerns |
|---|---|
| School Security: | |
| | School violence |
| | School discipline |
| | Student behavior |
| | Safety & protection of students & staff |
| | Drug and alcohol issues |
| | Protection of school property |
| Educational Welfare of Students: | |
| | University entrance quotas |
| | Student dropouts |
| | Students working while in jr. & sr. high |
| | Education of non-university bound students |
| | Job opportunities for graduates |
| Educational Finance: | |
| | Teachers' salaries |
| | Local tax burden |
| | Decreasing government grants |
| | Contract negotiations with teachers |
| | Financial equity among school districts |
| Teacher Development: | |
| | Teacher education programs at universities |
| | Teacher work overload |
| | Keeping educators in their profession |
| | Teacher staff development |
| Curriculum Content: | |
| | Environmental education |
| | Changes in curricula |
| | Moral education |

that emerged from them, offer some insight into the future responsibilities of school board members.

Providing students with a high quality educational program that has the support of parents will continue to be a major responsibility of school board members, as indicated by the number of predictions contained in the "accountability to the public" theme and by the relatively high rankings of those issues. However, the high rankings of the predictions associated with educational finance provide evidence that school board members must deliver a quality educational program in the least expensive manner.

School board members will continue to feel a direct allegiance to the general public and only a secondary allegiance to students and teachers. This corresponds to the understanding that "schooling [is] ... too important to be left entirely to professionals" (Townsend, 1990, p. 155).

Something that did not emerge in past studies of Canadian school board members is the predicted school board member responsibility for school security. This finding is significant in its implications for policy and practice at the school level. For example, it is probable that perceived deterioration of order and safety in schools will be resisted by school board members. It appears that public perceptions that discipline is a major problem in schools, described by Robinson (1977), is now shared by school board members.

The future responsibilities of school board members will likely include preserving local control of education, as shown by the theme with the largest number of predicted issues,

"educational governance." School board members see this long-standing responsibility as something that is not negotiable. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that school board members wish to wrest control of education from provincial governments, departments of education, and teachers. Rather, it means that the Canadian tradition of local school board governance, as authorized by provincial governments, will continue to be taken seriously by school board members.

The theme of "educational welfare of students" that emerged from the predicted concerns of school board members shows that these local politicians foresee an ongoing responsibility for maintaining an educational structure that supports students in the transition from school to work. Although this continuing responsibility is apparently secondary to school board members' allegiance to the general public, it does represent a commitment to students.

The future responsibilities of school board members that are implicit in the responses to the "School Board Member Predicted Concern Inventory" are consistent with the common good of society. There was no evidence, unless it was within the concept of local control, of self-interest on the part of school board members.

## Implications

Several cautions must be noted in relation to the study findings. As always, self-reporting data are subject to respondents' biases and memories. Care should be taken to attribute the study results only to the general perceptions of school board members representing many different school districts

rather than to particular settings or individuals. In addition, this study reports the opinions expressed by a specific set of school board members at a particular time; the opinions of the total population of school board members in western Canada might have been similar in some ways and different in others.

Despite these limitations, some tentative implications can be drawn from the study findings. For example, the study results and the accompanying discussion were used to infer a generalized belief structure to which school board members appear to subscribe. Knowing the belief structure may prove useful to educational stakeholders working with school board members and to school board members wishing to examine the value system underlying their decision making. It is important to stress the preliminary nature of the following belief structure; another researcher might develop the belief structure differently. The inferred beliefs are:

* The collective good of society is to be protected and strengthened.
* Cost-effectiveness is a top priority.
* Existing curriculum content is generally satisfactory.
* Curricular change is not a major responsibility of school board members.
* Innovative strategies for delivering educational programs should be supported if they are cost-effective.
* Anything that jeopardizes the safe and orderly environment of schools should not be tolerated.
* Gender issues are relatively unimportant.

* Teachers are not adversaries.
* Teachers are employees who have been hired to do a job and they should do it.
* When teachers are hired, they come "developed" and teacher development endeavors are relatively unimportant.
* School board members are advocates of students only indirectly.
* School board control over local school governance will not be relinquished willingly.
* The mandate of school boards does not include addressing illiteracy and poverty directly.

One possible result of school board members making decisions on the basis of the above beliefs is that education will become an increasingly politicized field. This will be partially due to the large number of demands placed on school board members and education in general, the reluctance of school board members to see their power in education diminished, and the dearth of financial resources at the disposal of school boards.

For teachers, the foreseeable future will likely contain little professional or economic advancement. There is apparently little willingness on the part of school board members to relinquish power and control of education to teachers or any other special interest group. As well, teacher workload is unlikely to be reduced if it is left to the discretion of school board members; in fact, the opposite may occur because of rising demands and diminishing resources. Teacher development programs may suffer for the same reasons. In fact, teachers may be hard

pressed to simply maintain their current professional and financial status.

It is improbable that school board members will achieve significant success with their responses to social issues like illiteracy, poverty, and gender roles. These are relatively low priorities for most school board members and removed from their experience. This will make it difficult for school board members to better understand and find solutions for these complex matters.

The near future is likely to be a time when innovative teaching structures will be well received by school board members. Models that are perceived to deliver educational programs of a reasonable quality at a low cost will be supported by school board members under pressure to achieve high levels of cost-effectiveness.

Finally, teachers and principals who try to maintain safety and order in their schools will be supported by their school boards. The high levels of concern with student behavior, school discipline, and violence that school board members predict for the future are likely to result in school district policies that allow school officials to use strong disciplinary measures when dealing with unruly students.

## Conclusion

Predicting educational trends does not mean that they will occur. Instead, possibilities can be identified so potential problems can be ameliorated prior to their becoming crises. Other possibilities that are preferred but quite tenuous can be supported to increase the probability of their materializing.

Therefore, the trends and the belief structure discussed in this paper may be different from those that actually ensue. However, it is through examination of the future that people are able to consider unexplored options, to cope better with unexpected developments, and to view their circumstances from alternative perspectives.

References

Alberta School Trustees' Association. (1983). School boards: Actions and words. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Alberta Teachers' Association. (1993). Trying to teach. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Awender, M. (1988) Issues addressed by trustees. The Canadian School Executive, 7(10), 31-32.

Bennis, W. (1989). On becoming a leader. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Borg, W.R., & Gall, M.D. (1979). Educational research (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.

Bosetti, L. (1992). Policy implementation: A holistic perspective. Applying Research to the Classroom, 10(1), 6-8.

Burger, J. (1991). Priorities for policy research in Canadian education. In R.R. O'Reilly & C.J. Lautar (Eds.), Policy research and development in Canadian education (pp. 223-226). Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary.

Canadian Gallup Poll Ltd. (1984). Gallup summary report. Edmonton, AB: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 251 171)

Coleman, P. (1974). The school trustee and educational leadership. Interchange, 5(2), 53-62.

Coleman, P., & LaRocque, L. (1990). Struggling to be 'good enough': Administrative practices and school district ethos. New York: Falmer.

Collinge, J., & Coleman, P. (1992, April). Home-school collaboration: Teacher practices and parent attitudes. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Cronbach, L.J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and internal structure of tests. Psychometrika, 16, 297-334.

Curriculum Branch. (1985). Destination decisions. Melbourne: Education Department of Victoria.

Donaldson, E.L. (1992). Patterns and profiles in the transition from school to work. Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations, 7(1), 30-47).

Downey, L.W. (1988). Policy analysis in education. Calgary, AB: Detselig.

Goodenough, W.H. (1981). Culture, language, and society. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.

Herman, J.J., & Herman, J.L. (1991). The positive development of human resources and school district organizations. Lancaster, PA: Technomic.

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K.H. (1988). Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources (5th ed.). Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, F.P. (1991). Joining together: Group theory and group skills (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kimbrough, R.B., & Burkett, C.W. (1990). The principalship: Concepts and practices. Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

LaRocque, L. (1986). Policy implementation in a school district: A multiperspective approach. Canadian Journal of Education, 11(4), 486-507.

Lawton, S.B. (1987). The price of quality: The public finance of elementary and secondary education in Canada. Toronto, ON: Canadian Education Association.

Livingstone, D.W. (1970). Alternative futures for formal education. Interchange, 1(4), 13-27.

Males, M. (1992). 'Top school problems' are myths. Phi Delta Kappan, 74(1), 54-55.

McLaughlin, M.W. (1991). Enabling professional development: What have we learned? In A. Lieberman & L. Miller (Eds.), Staff development for education in the '90s (2nd ed.) (pp. 61-82). New York: Teachers College Press.

Nielsen, V., & Robinson, N. (1980). Partisan school board elections: New evidence to support them. Administrator's Notebook, 29(3), 1-4.

O'Reilly, R.R. (1991). Educational policy research in Canada. In R.R. O'Reilly & C.J. Lautar (Eds.), Policy research and development in Canadian education (pp. 1-5). Calgary, AB: The University of Calgary.

Orlich, D.C. (1989) Staff development: Enhancing human potential. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Ortiz, F.I., & Marshall, C. (1988). Women in educational administration. In N.J. Boyan (Ed.), Handbook of research on educational administration (pp. 123-141). New York: Longman.

Phi Delta Kappa. (1984). Handbook for conducting future studies in education. Bloomington, IN: Author.

Robinson, N. (1977, June). Attitudes toward the public schools: A Canadian-American comparison. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration, Fredericton, NB. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 165 246)

Rossett, A. (1982). A typology for generating needs assessments. Journal of Instructional Development, 6(1), 28-33.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1991). The principalship (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Shakeshaft, C. (1986). A gender at risk. Phi Delta Kappan, 67(7), 499-503.

Sheehan, N. (1991). Sexism in education. In R. Ghosh & D. Ray (Eds.), Social change and education in Canada (2nd ed.) (pp. 277-292). Toronto, ON: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Townsend, R.G. (1990). With the board in mind: Trustees look at issues and prospects. In Y.L.J. Lam (Ed.), Canadian public education system: Issues and prospects (pp.155-173). Calgary, AB: Detselig.

Webber, C.F. (1992). A summary of principals' concerns: A needs assessment. Applying Research to the Classroom, 10(1), 15-18.

Webber, C.F. (1993). School board member concerns: Priorities, themes, and perceptions. Unpublished manuscript.

Webber, C.F. (1994). A Delphi inventory of principals' current concerns. The Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations, 9(1), 26-42.

Wolcott, H.F. (1967). A Kwakiutl village and school. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Young, B. (1990). Not there yet: Women in educational administration. In Y.L.J. Lam (Ed.), Canadian public education system: Issues and prospects (pp.85-102). Calgary, AB: Detselig.

APPENDIX

THE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER PREDICTED CONCERN INVENTORY

Please respond to the following demographic questions. (The information will be used to see if there are statistically significant differences in the views of specific groups of school board members. **Please note that you are responding anonymously.**)

1. Your school jurisdiction is a

   __ public school district

   __ Catholic separate school district

   __ Protestant separate school district

   __ county system

   __ school division

   __ other (Please specify _____ )

2. Number of years of school board experience _____

3. Approximate number of students in your jurisdiction _____

4. Please indicate your highest level of formal education _____
   (e.g. high school matriculation, technical school graduation, some university, undergraduate degree, graduate degree, etc.)

5. Your age _____

6. You are _____ male _____ female

Predict how important the following randomly ordered educational issues WILL BE TO SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS IN THE FUTURE.

**Please circle the appropriate number for each item, using the scale below.**

**NO IMPORTANCE** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT**

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role of the school board | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Teacher role in school management | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Formation of new school districts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Integration of students with special needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Number of trustees on board | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Public confidence in schools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Public & Catholic board conflict | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Student self-esteem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Membership in the school boards' association | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Legal issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| International comparisons of student achievement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Environmental education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Program variety in small schools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Moral education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Student evaluation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Keeping tchrs. & admstrs. in profession | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Teacher evaluation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Role of the teachers' association | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| School board accountability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Teacher work overload | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Local tax burden | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Teacher staff development | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Decreasing government grants | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Rapid societal change | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Financial equality among school districts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Effects of media on students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Changes in technology | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Educat. of non-university bound students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Year round schooling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Private schools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Distance education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Home schooling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(table continues)

**(Continued)** Predict how important the following randomly ordered educational issues WILL BE TO SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS IN THE FUTURE.

**Please circle the appropriate number for each item, using the scale below.**

**NO IMPORTANCE** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT**

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| User pay education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Voucher systems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| University entrance quotas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Teacher education programs at universities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Education of seniors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Role of department of education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Teacher salaries | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Student dropouts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Pressure from provincial politicians | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Decreasing student enrolment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Maintaining Catholic school districts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Leadership by provincial government | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Contract negotiations with teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Changes in curricula | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| School discipline | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Poverty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Student behavior | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Gender issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| School violence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Illiteracy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Protection of school property | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Redefining the role of the school | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students working while in jr. & sr. high school | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Schools taking on too much | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Safety & protection of students & staff | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Changes in family structure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Drug & alcohol issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Parental support for schools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Job opportunities for graduates | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | | |